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Argentina - North Korea: Break in Relations

Argentina recently severed diplomatic relations with North Korea after Pyongyang's entire mission had abruptly left the country. The break was largely a product of the suspicion with which the Videla government has viewed North Korean activities in Argentina. The move undoubtedly pleased the highly conservative Argentine navy, which controls the Foreign Ministry.

The North Koreans contend that they left Argentina because of harassment and surveillance by Argentine security and intelligence services. A note of explanation to President Videla stated that until the situation improved, North Korean diplomatic matters with Argentina would be handled by the mission in Cuba; no mention was made, however, of ending diplomatic relations.

The staunchly anti-Marxist government in Buenos Aires, suspicious that communist aid is going to subversive groups in Argentina, has long kept close watch on the communist missions. Official Soviet and Romanian personnel, as well as communist news correspondents, are restricted to a limited area in and around Buenos Aires, and North Korean staff members were also under travel restrictions.

Recent reports indicate that Argentina intended to reduce the number of both North Korean and Cuban personnel assigned to their embassies in Buenos Aires. The decision to do so apparently was awaiting an assessment of economic and political benefits and losses.

The North Koreans have steadily reduced the staff of their mission in Buenos Aires over the past year in response to obvious Argentine irritation about improprieties and the crude behavior of North Korean diplomats. 3.5(c)

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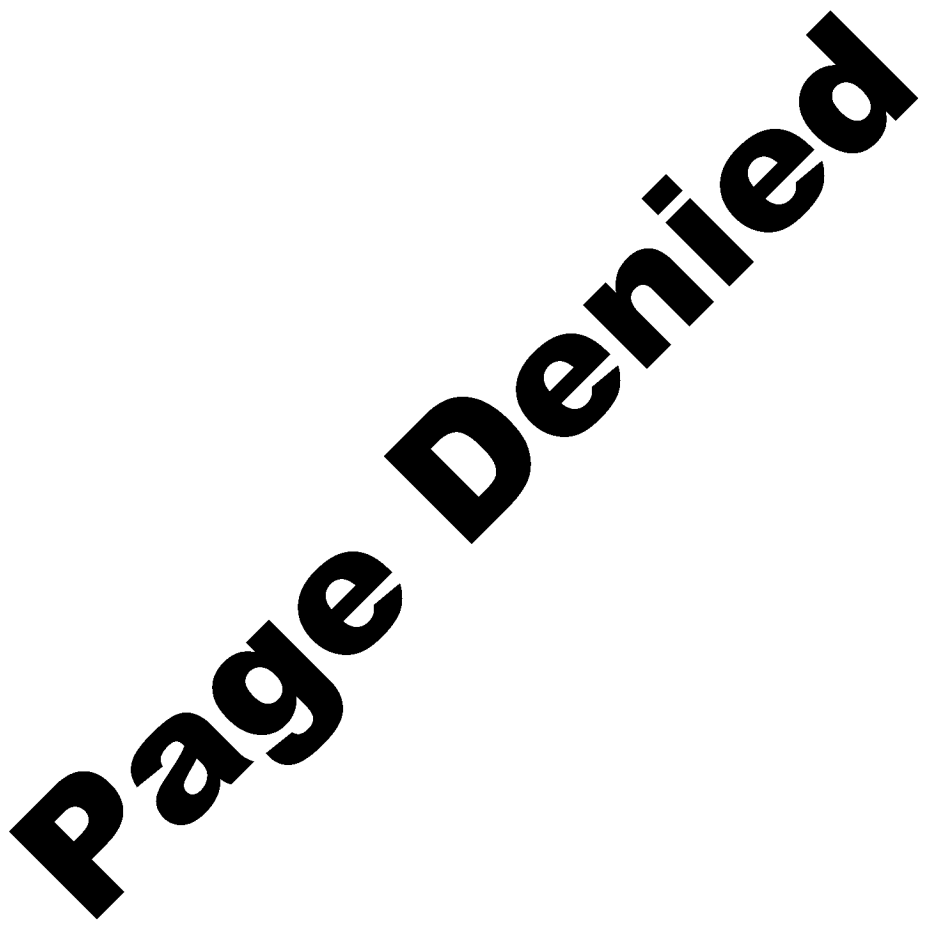

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